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1871

The Paris Commune

By

Max Shachtman

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The Paris Commune

By Max Shachtman

"This history. . . is due to their children, to all the workingmen of the earth. The child has the right to know the reason of its paternal defeats, the Socialist party, the campaign of its flag in all countries. He who tells the people revolutionary legends, he who amuses them with sensational stories, is as criminal as the geographer who would draw up false charts for navigation."—Lissagaray.

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1871: The Paris Commune

By Max Shachtman

The Fall of Second Empire.

The history of the origin of the Commune is the history of the fall of the empire of Louis Napoleon after the Franco-Prussian war. The power of Bonapartism, which had skilfully utilized the struggles of the classes to perpetuate its own rule was being confronted by the prospects of disintegration and death. Opposed on the one hand by a rising bourgeoisie which squirmed under the exactions of the imperial court and the absence of any considerable political power, and on the other hand by the workers who were daily feeling the burden of taxes, hunger and unemployment weighing them to the ground, their sons killed in the adventures of Napoleon in "the desert plains of Syria, Cochin-China and Mexico," and their leaders hounded and imprisoned, Napoleon the Little sought an exit from the **cul de sac** by means of a new war.

Not for nothing did Napoleon have a sharp political instinct. With the map of Europe torn into a multicolored quilt of tiny nations, independent provinces and dubious border lines, the Frenchman was able to maintain his own position by a well considered exploitation of national aspirations and wars. The famous principle of nationalities was

". . . a Bonapartist discovery the aim of which was to strengthen the Bonapartism of Napoleon inside of France. . . After the **coup d'etat** of 1851, Louis Napoleon, this emperor 'by grace of God and the will of the people,' was forced, to cover his foreign policy, to find

a slogan which would appear to be democratic and popular. What then could have a better effect than the principle of nationality?"*

With this principle in mind he had carried on his machinations during the German war to organize the Caucasian peoples against Russia, and later the uprisings of the Poles and Finns; to follow, at the Paris Congress which was held after the Crimean war, with a demand for autonomy for the Roumanians and the consideration of the national question in Italy; to incite with the help of Kossuth a Hungarian uprising against Germany during the Italian war of 1859; to support one year a policy of aiding Italy's struggle against Austria and the next time to pursue a policy of neutrality in the Austro-Prussian conflict—for the consideration of "compensations" which he never received.

It was this last blow that Bismarck gave to Bonaparte that led onward to the war of 1870. This time, however, the all too cunning emperor reckoned without the developments which were taking place before his very eyes.

Austria, the oppressor of Italy, was being slowly parte that led onward to the wor of 1870. This time, established. The campaign of national freedom of Italy "up to the Adriatic" was begun in the spring of 1859, under the benevolent aegis of czarist Russia and Bonapartist France; a national revolutionary movement of growing profundity began among the masses of the people, and with the popular leadership of Garibaldi, they soon stood on the threshold of national unity. And when, in August, 1870, Napoleon was forced to withdraw his troops from Rome in order to strengthen his positions in his own war, the eternal city completed the establishment of the Italian state under the booming of the artillery of King Victor Emanuel II. The back-

* Friedrich Engels: "What Have the Working Classes to do with Poland?" 1866.

bone of the power of Pius IX was broken, Bonaparte was a man of the past, and Victor Emanuel was shortly thereafter able to establish his royal estate in Rome. Bonaparte had forever lost a stamping ground in the boot of Europe.

Much the same development was taking place in Germany, a country which had been deliberately split up for centuries. The very condition for existence of Bonapartist power was German national disunity: in almost the direct proportion that the German state grew towards consolidation the power of the French adventurer disintegrated. The decade-long humiliation of Prussia by the Napoleons from the west and Czardom from the east was, however, reaching an end. The latter's influence on Prussian affairs can be said to have terminated in the conference of Olmutz in 1850, where Prussia was forced to renounce alliance with Schleswig-Holstein; from that time onward Russia became a constantly more negligible factor in the struggle for German consolidation.

Napoleon III remained then the greatest hindrance to German unity up to the Franco-Prussian war. Beginning with the treaty of Tilsit, at the opening of the nineteenth century, Prussia was stripped to a population of less than five millions and less than three thousand square miles, and a close alliance against her was made between France and Russia. A year before that in 1806, Napoleon, not satisfied with the division between Austria and Prussia, created the Rhine Alliance composed of a number of German princes, with the condition that in any war, even one against Germans, an army of 63,000 was to be at his disposal.

With the creation of "**la troisieme Allemagne**" (the third Germany) it was expected to aggravate the separatist condition of this potentially powerful neighbor of France. Germany seemed so hopelessly weakened that even the tiny monarchy of Denmark was able to hold Schleswig-Holstein defiantly.

But powerful economic factors were driving towards a national unity. While other nations continued to build up high tariff walls against German products, the disorganized condition of Germany placed it in a position where in 1806 there were 67 separate customs tariffs between the various provinces. With great difficulties the German princes and the German free states began to ally themselves in their **Zollvereine**, customs unions; trade treaties were negotiated and consummated between these alliances and Holland, England, Greece, Turkey and Belgian; in 1853 a trade treaty was signed with Austria; and, finally, after years of labor, a customs parliament was formed at the time of the founding of a North German confederation under the hegemony of Prussia in 1867.

Two decades before, the "spectre that was haunting all Europe" was suppressed in blood in Berlin, Paris and Vienna, and the bourgeoisie fled into the arms of the reactionary forces, nowhere more so than in Germany, where the prestige of the Prussian Junkers was enhanced by their victory over the proletariat in 1848. And in Prussia, the "iron chancellor" Bismarck took the helm.

Inexorable as a juggernaught, and riding powerfully the wave of historical development, Bismarck worked to hammer into shape a mighty German nation, molded in the image of Prussia. In 1864, a year after his hand took the rudder of the ship of state, Bismarck opened his campaign with a war against Denmark over the duchies of Schleswig and Holstein. The German patriots raised a vehement agitation for the freeing of the provinces from oppression by Denmark.

In a swift campaign with the aid of Austria, the provinces were taken and divided among the victors: Holstein to Austria and Schleswig to Prussia. The division of spoils again raised the years-old question: Austria or Prussia? Under whose hegemony was Germany to be united? Bismarck replied with blood and

iron. Assuring himself of the neutrality of Russia by aiding her against Poland, satisfying Napoleon with promises of compensation, and securing friendliness from Italy by the restitution of Venetia, he launched his war against Austria. In a few decisive battles Austria was crushed; Bismarck took back Holstein,—which had been conquered in common with Austria in 1864—and annexed Hanover, Kassel, Hessen-Nassau, and the free city of Frankfort. Only one thing now stood in the way of complete German unity: the Second Empire of Napoleon III. Only the imperial tiara of Bonaparte could fitly crown the German emperor and Bismarck was most keenly aware of this fact.

> ". . . That the peace with Austria carried with it the war with France was not only known by Bismarck but even desired by him. . . Even before the Austrian war, interpellated by a minister of a minor state about his demagogic German policy, Bismarck answered him that he would throw Austria out of Germany and shatter the alliance despite all phrases.—'And do you believe that the smaller states will stand by silently?'—'You smaller states, you will do nothing.' —'Then what will become of the Germans?'—'Then I will lead them to Paris and unite them there'."*

No less anxious for a military struggle was Napoleon. While the minister of war, Lebeuf, declared himself in favor of reducing the number of recruits by 10,000 and the president of the council of ministers, Olivier, replied to interpellations from deputies that at no time was peace so assured as at this moment, the preparations for war went on rapidly. The immediate reason for declaring war was soon found by Napoleon in the question of the accession to the Spanish throne.

Three times the throne of Spain was offered to the Hohenzollern Prince Leopold, and like Julius Caesar,

* Quoted by Engels from a report to the Manchester Guardian by Mrs. Crawford, its Paris correspondent, in Engels' unfinished work: Gewalt und Oekonomie bei der Herstellung des neuen Deutschen Reichs. Berlin, 1920.

three times he declined. The presence of a Hohenzollern on the Spanish throne was an easy point of agitation for the French war mongers; in furious language they incited France against this proposed insult to French dignity and interests. And as the moment neared for Leopold to take the throne, for he had finally consented in the face even of opposition on the part of the Prussian king, Wilhelm I, Napoleon sent his emissary Benedetti to Ems to meet with Wilhelm and demand Leopold's withdrawal from the throne. The Prussian, not overanxious for war, and threatened by Benedetti, finally secured the withdrawal.

But Napoleon was not satisfied with this. He instructed Benedetti to demand of Wilhelm guarantees that also in the future no Hohenzollern prince was under any circumstances to take the Spanish throne, and that if such guarantees were not furnished then France would know where it stood and would halt at no measures to defend its interests. Again Wilhelm assured Benedetti, in a quite friendly manner, that the matter had been completely liquidated and that France need have no worry over the question of the Spanish throne. Still Napoleon urged his emissary to demand guarantees at any price. An adjutant of Wilhelm's then informed the Frenchman that the question was settled and that all other matters should be liquidated by negotiations between the French and Prussian cabinets.

At the same time Wilhelm sent a dispatch to Bismarck concerning the developments in the negotiations, a dispatch couched in most friendly terms, which Bismarck was told he might publish should he so desire. Bismarck received the Ems dispatch at luncheon with Moltke and Roon. In his memoirs he relates how the tone of the message caused him to lose his appetite, and at the same time all prospects of war with France. But in a short five minutes of work at his writing table he had so well "revised" the dispatch that Moltke cried: "Now it has a different ring; it sounded before like a

parley; now it is like the flourish in answer to a challenge."

The consequent publication of the Ems dispatch in the press of the world gave Napoleon the opportunity for which he had worked. On July 19, 1870, France declared war against Prussia and the **Corps Legislatif** approved the action with opposition from only a small minority.

Only a short time before the declaration of war, Napoleon had instigated a raid upon the French branches of the International Workingmen's Association, the First International, and arrested sixty of the leading agitators. Largely due to the work of the International in France, the famous plebiscite of Napoleon, by which he intended to place himself more firmly in the saddle, was rejected overwhelmingly by the working class population and carried only by the vote of the rural sections. Thruout the country the International carried on a propaganda against the war. On July 22 they published a manifesto declaring to the

". . . French, German, Spanish workingmen! Let our voices unite in one cry of reprobation against war! . . . War for a question of preponderance or a dynasty, can, in the eyes of workmen, be nothing but a criminal absurdity. . . Brothers of Germany! Our division would only result in the complete triumph of despotism on both sides of the Rhine. . . Workmen of all countries! Whatever may for the present become of our common efforts, we, the members of the International Workingmen's Association, who know of no frontiers, we send you, as a pledge of indissoluble solidarity, the good wishes and the salutation of the workmen of France."

And from Germany they received an answer in the same spirit. When the vote occurred in the North German Diet on war credits, the supporters of LaSalle voted with the monarchy for war, while the members of the International, Liebknecht and Bebel, abstained from voting and entered their statement. Liebknecht and

Bebel, fearing to vote against war credits because such a step might be interpreted as evasive support of Napoleon, were nevertheless hailed by Marx from London for having for the first time raised the banner of the International in a European parliament on such an important point. Two days after the outbreak of the war, Bebel and Liebknecht appeared before the conference of the Saxon social democrats at Chemnitz, which adopted a resolution denouncing the war as dynastic and calling upon the German workers and democrats to join in the protest of the French proletariat. Similar resolutions were adopted in mass meetings in Leipzig, Nurnberg, Munich, Berlin, Konigsberg, Furth, and elsewhere. In the declaration which Bebel read in the name of Liebknecht and himself they said:

"The present war is a dynastic war, undertaken in the interests of the Bonaparte dynasty just as the war of 1866 was in the interests of the Hohenzollern dynasty. . . As opponents in principle to every dynastic war, as social republicans and members of the International Workingmen's Association, which fights all oppressors irrespective of nationality, which seeks to unite into one great brotherhood all oppressed, we cannot either directly or indirectly declare ourselves for the present war and therefore abstain from voting, thus expressing the confident hope that the peoples of Europe, learning from the present disastrous events, will do their utmost to achieve their right to self-determination and throw aside the present rule of class and sabre, as the cause of all state and social evil."

In the General Council of the International, Marx prepared an address on the declaration of war which was spread widely thruout France and Germany. Already before Sedan he warned the German working class that if they were to "allow the present war to lose its strictly defensive character and to degenerate into a war against the French people, victory or defeat will prove alike disastrous." And ominously he prophecied: "Whatever may be the incidents of Louis Bonaparte's war with Prussia, the death knell of the Second Empire has already sounded at Paris. It will end, as it began, by a parody."

The prediction of Marx was correct. Bonaparte had calculated badly. Austria, notwithstanding Napoleon's hope that she would support him in revengeful memory of Sadowa of 1866, stood aside; Denmark, whose support he had hoped for on the basis of the annexation of Schleswig-Holstein, remained quiet; and Italy, which was celebrating its national unity by the taking of Rome —following the withdrawal of Bonaparte's troops—also failed to come to the aid of Napoleon. Bismarck, with a well- trained army and a stronger political base at home, cut thru the Napoleonic forces like a sheet of steel.

By August 9, the French army had suffered three severe defeats within a week. Napoleon took over the nominal command of the army in an utterly futile attempt to bring some order into the chaotic forces of France. On the 29th, MacMahon was caught and trounced at Beaumont l'Argonne and yet pushed on, leaving Bazaine shut up in Metz. On the 1st of September the army of France was surrounded by 200,000 Germans at Sedan and on the next day the miserable emperor delivered up his sword to the King of Prussia. A short time later, the King of Prussia was crowned the emperor of Germany in the Hall of Mirrors of the Versailles Palace. Bismarck had been as good as his word: He had led the Germans to France to unite them there.

The news of the defeat of Sedan and the surrender of Napoleon immediately reached Paris. Exasperated, enraged and militant, the Parisians marched in masses to the Palais Bourbon, the seat of the Chamber of Deputies. Everywhere was heard the cry: **"Vive la République!"** The soldiers who guarded the bridge and the palace refused to shoot at the demonstrators. The mob surged into the palace and broke into the sessions

of the Corps Legislatif. Granger, a follower of the revolutionary party of Blanqui, seized the bell of the president and shouted:

"Citizens, in face of our disasters and the misfortunes of France, the people of Paris has invaded this place to proclaim the fall of the Empire and the Republic. We demand that the deputies decree this."

Amid silence, Jules Favre, one of the deputies, spoke from the tribune: "Citizens, at the very moment when the people invaded this place, the deputies were deliberating the pronouncement of the fall of the Empire and the proclamation of the Republic. Since the people have penetrated into this Assembly, the Republic should not be proclaimed here, but at the Hotel de Ville."

On the same day, September 4, 1870, the republic was proclaimed from the Hotel de Ville and the Government of National Defense instituted. The war had achieved the unification of Germany; it had broken the omnipotence of the Pope and realized the unity of Italy. And on the ashes of the Second Empire rose the phoenix of the Third Republic.

The Rise of the Commune.

"We hail the advent of the Republic of France," declared the second manifesto of the International Workingmen's Association, written on September 9th, "but at the same time we labor under misgivings which we hope will prove groundless. That Republic has not subverted the throne, but only taken its place become vacant. It has been proclaimed not as a social conquest, but as a national measure of defense. It is in the hands of a Provisional Government composed partly of notorious Orleanists, partly of middle-class Republicans, upon some of whom the insurrection of June, 1848, has left its indelible stigma."

But the misgivings did not prove groundless, as Marx had hoped.

The war, despite the previous assurances of Wilhelm II, did not end with the overthrow of the Second

Empire. The German patriots were demanding the prosecution of the war for the purpose of annexing Alsace-Lorraine. And against their agitation, the German workers were demanding "an honorable peace for France and the recognition of the French Republic." Engels, before Sedan, on August 15, wrote to Marx giving six points of direction to the German social democrats in connection with the war:

"These people (the social democrats of Germany) can 1. Join the national movement. . . so far and so long as it is limited to the defense of Germany. . . 2. Thereby to emphasize the difference between German national interests and those of the dynastic Prussians; 3. To work against any annexation of Alsace-Lorraine; 4. As soon as there is at the helm in Paris a republican, non-chauvinistic government, to work for an honorable peace with it; constantly to hold up the unity of interests of the German and French workers who did not approve of the war and between whom there is no enmity; 6. Russia as in the Address of the International.

Marx fully agreed with Engels and he immediately proceeded to write to the Brunswick committee of the German party to work in accordance with such an outline. In the second manifesto of the committee, on September 5, a ringing call for working class demonstrations was issued: for the ending of the war, the recognition of the French Republic and the consummation of an honorable peace; against the annexation of the Alsace-Lorraine territory; the manifesto contained sections which included the very words which Marx had written to them In four days, the signers of the manifesto were seized by the military camorra and dragged in chains to the fortress of Lotzen.

In the North German Diet, at its reconvening in December, not only Liebknecht and Bebel, but the

* Briefwechsel zwischen Marx und Engels, Vol. IV., p. 319.

combined vote of the Eisenachers and the LaSallleans was cast against the granting of new war credits. In every speech of the former, in every issue of their journals, they agitated against the continuation of the war, and with such effectiveness that they were finally arrested for high treason against the empire. In every country, the demands of the second manifesto of the International for an honorable peace, the recognition of the Republic, and against the Alsatian annexation, were warmly and loudly echoed.

Bismarck, however, continued to besiege Paris and the provisional regime of France became a government of national indifference. Installed by the common agreement of twelve men, enthusiastically and almost blindly supported by the thousands of Parisians who had gathered at the Hotel de Ville, the government of national defense might have continued to hold France at its feet.

The day of its proclamation, the Bakuninist Alliance of the Socialist Democracy considered as an appropriate one "to unchain the hydra of Revolution." Manifestoes were printed in Switzerland calling for the formation of free corps to fight against the Prussians. But the hydra was checked quickly by the seizure of the manifestoes in Switzerland. Bakunin hurried to Lyons. Together with other anarchists he seized the town hall of Lyons on September 26, and in the first point of his proclamation decreed the abolition of the state. But the state is not to be abolished by decree or pronunciamento, for despite the proclamation the state returned to Lyons thru an unguarded gate, in the form of two companies of the National Guard, swept the rebels out of the Town Hall and arrested Bakunin who managed to escape with the aid of some friends. He proceeded to Marseilles where he remained for almost a month; a few days after his

departure to Geneva, the Commune was proclaimed in Marseilles and in four days overthrown.*

At St. Etienne the Commune existed for an hour, but in almost every instance it was only necessary to speak a word in order to have authority back in the hands of the National Assembly. In the period of struggle against the Prussian everyone feared to create the slightest embarrassment for the government.

The Government of National Defense could do one of the two things: it could mobilize all the forces of France for an energetic struggle against the Prussian armies, or it could point out to the people the hopelessness of any manner of victory and attempt the conclusion of an honorable peace. But it did neither. While the Parisian masses demanded an organized fight against the besieging Prussians, the government did nothing but mask its unwillingness behind hopeless and anarchic sorties which accomplished nothing but the killing of French soldiers and the enraging of the Parisians. Trochu, the governor of Paris, failed to unite the National Guard, the **Garde Mobile**, and the armed civilians who stood ready to defend France. Trochu, who had declared to his colleagues that it would be madness to attempt the defense of Paris, spoke to revolutionary Parisians thru the mouths of Jules Favre and Thiers in quite a different tone: "We will not cede an inch of our territory, nor a stone of our fortresses." "The Governor of Paris will never capitulate." And while they spoke they were beginning to conduct their shameless negotiations with the

* To maintain a critical attitude towards the activities of Bakunin in the France of this period is one thing, to deride, jeer and denounce it, as is the tendency of numerous commentators, is quite another. Bakunin was called to Lyons by the revolutionary workingmen, and while his "abolition of the state" was a theoretical and practical absurdity, his work in Lyons was a spirited attempt to awaken the French proletariat to a spirit of struggle against the enemy on the outside and against capitalist society.

Prussians for a peace that would put an end to the rebellious National Guard and to mutinous Paris

In October the agitation began again. On the 8, the crowds gathered under the windows of the Hotel de Ville shouting, "Vive la Comune!" On the last day of the month, the Parisian proletariat enraged by the news of the surrender of Bazaine at Metz, again gathered in the streets. Led by Blanqui, the government was ousted and a new one installed, but while Blanqui remained in possession of the city hall for a moment, his moderate colleagues withdrew. The overthrown government returned with a few squadrons of Breton soldiers and to avoid civil war in the face of the Prussian enemy, Blanqui agreed to withdraw on the assurance that the old government would immediately hold elections in Paris.

Instead of the promised elections, a cunningly conceived plebescite was presented to the people: "Those who wish that the Government of National Defense should be maintained will vote: Yes." And in fear of a government composed, as the brief regime of October 31, solely of Blanqui, 322,000 electors chose to sustain a government of national defense; only 63,000 voted against its maintenance. With such a mandate the government of Thiers and Jules Favre proceeded to arrest 25 of the revolutionaries; Blanqui was forced into hiding and Flourens, one of his followers, was arrested.

The workers of Paris continued to starve and Trochu continued his fake sorties. On the 19 of January, 1871, the sortie of a most pitiable nature which was halted at Buzenval, brought to the masses the realization that the government was preparing to capitulate to the Prussians.

The Republican Alliance, joining with the Clubs and the vigilance committees, planned a new uprising which was swiftly suppressed on the 22. Its only result was the replacing of Trochu by the monarchist

general Vinoy, whose debut was made with an announcement that he would not create any illusions for himself, that the critical moment had arrived, he threatened the "party of disorder" more than the Prussians.

Five days later Jules Favre had negotiated an armistice with Bismarck with the provision that a national assembly was to be elected within eight days for the purpose of concluding a peace. The peasantry thruout the country had been poisoned by the monarchists with propaganda against the Parisians, and they raised the hue and cry against the Republic with the demand for a peace at any price. Legitimists, Orleanists, nobles, well-to-do farmers, captains of industry, clergymen, the blackest forces of reaction united to crush the new menace of revolutionary Paris. Out of the 750 members elected to the Assembly, fully 450 were born monarchists.

The menace of republican Paris grew daily. The entry of the Prussian troops had been met by the Parisians with barricades and an armed people. The streets were deserted, black flags hung from the houses, the shops were closed, statues were veiled, and there were no gas lights. In two days the Prussians left the city, leaving in the hearts of the Parisians a most bitter and profound resentment against the new Assembly.

The Assembly of the "Rurals" quickly took to its task. This body, whose sole function was to choose between peace and war and to negotiate, in the event of the former, a treaty, was immediately transformed into an executive organ for the extermination of Paris. The representatives of Paris were constantly insulted and provoked. "You are covered with the blood of civil war!" cried the conservatives. And Thiers* ap-

* Marx described him as "Thiers, the master in small roguery, a virtuoso in perjury and treason, a craftsman in all the petty strategems, cunning devices and base perfidies of parliamentary warfare; never scrupling, when out of office, to fan a revolution, and to stifle it in blood when

pearing now in the role of too long injured innocence, made it plain that the treaty of peace must be endorsed without any palavering in order that Prussia might permit the opening of war against Paris and the Republic.

But Paris, working class Paris was armed. Favre, in his negotiations of an armistice with Bismarck had demanded that the arms of the National Guard be confiscated. But the cautious Prussian refused: "You are foolish," he told the despicable and drunken forger. Bismarck was careful about inciting at that moment an armed force of over 200,000 men into a civil war which would mean a well-organized attack, at the same time, against the invaders. During the siege there had been distributed 450,000 arms to the Parisians; they were in possession of almost 2000 cannon; they had stored an almost inexhaustible amount of cartridges, powder and shot, which they jealously guarded. And every day, the republican army took on a more definite form.

The battalions of the Guard founded the Federation of the National Guard; at the second meeting, with the assembly of the Rurals menacing the republic, a commission was named to draw up a program and statutes for the federation; on the 3 of March the statutes were approved by the delegates, and finally, on the 13, the names of the Central Committee of the Federation of the National Guard were announced.

With three delegates from each arrondissement, elected without distinction of rank, the representatives of the National Guard set as their aim the duty "to prevent every attempt which had as its aim the overthrow of the Republic; they declared their "absolute

at the helm of the State; with class prejudices standing him in the place of ideas, and vanity in the place of a heart; his private life as infamous as his public life is odious—even now, when playing the part of a French Sulla, he cannot help setting off the abomination of his deeds by the ridicule of his ostentation."

right to name all of their chieftains and to recall them when they have lost the confidence of those who have elected them, always after a thoro inquiry destined to safeguard the sacred rights of justice." From the beginning the federation encompassed 215 batallions of the Guard, which, with the exception of an isolated Bonapartist batallion or two, included the entire force.

The Central Committee became the master of Paris. All ablebodied citizens were invited to organize committees of batallions, councils of legions, and to send delegates to the Central Committee. The universal opinion among the Parisians was that the Committee had saved Paris from destruction and disgrace by its courage and calmness during the brief occupation by the Prussians. And the venomous opposition of the Rurals Assembly towards the Federation only enhanced its prestige among the mutinous Parisian workingmen. Paris was an armed camp of the proletariat.

The monarchists in the Assembly fumed, and foamed at the mouth in their denunciations of Republican Paris. Victor Hugo, attempting to defend Garibaldi, was hooted and hissed; Delescluze, demanding the impeachment of the government of the national defense was not even listened to. The reactionaries demanded the arrest of the Central Committee and the prevailing opinion of the monarchists was that a blood bath would considerably cool the ardor of the Parisian dogs.

On the 10 of March, the Assembly voted to change its seat to Versailles, leaving Paris a capital without a national government and a city without a municipal government. The pay of the National Guard was practically discontinued, which meant that thousands upon thousands of Parisians were left to starve. A bill was passed providing for the payment of all bills due on November 13, 1870, in three days and all concessions were obstinately refused. No bill for the protection of some two or three hundred thousand workers, whose rent bills were due, was passed, throwing them on the

mercies of their landlords and creating a panic-stricken population overnight. In four days, 150,000 bills were dishonored.

A tax of two centimes was put upon every piece of printed matter, and Vinoy, the commander in chief of the army in Paris, immediately proceeded to suspend six Republican journals with the declaration that there could not be permitted the preaching of "sedition and disobedience to the laws." The Bonapartist Valentin was appointed the prefect of police. The Jesuit general, d'Aurelles de Paladine, who had been accused of incapacity and of being "brutal to the point of cruelty," was appointed by Thiers the head of the National Guard, an appointment which the latter refused to recognize. Flourens was courtmartialed and sentenced to death for his participation in the uprising of October 31, together with Blanqui, who was not even present at his trial.

The words of Thiers' provocative speeches also reached Paris, and the campaign of baiting and inciting the Parisians reached its climax with the demand for the surrender of their arms, the cannon for which they had popularly subscribed and which were the private property of the National Guard, the defenders of the Republic and of Paris.

To take the cannon was the first objective; to seize the fortifications, the small arms and ammunition, to complete the disarming of Paris was the final aim. But to take the cannon from the hands of the Guard, which considered it their own private property, was quite another thing from talking about it. Time and again detachments of troops presented themselves and demanded the cannon: on the 8 at Luxembourg; on the 9 at Montmatre; on the 16 at the Place des Vosges; and the cannon remained with the Guard. The mayors, tools of the Versaillese, attempted the role of conciliators with ill success. Clemenceau, then mayor of Montmartre, secured the agreement of some officers

to surrender the artillery, but when the troops of d'Aurelles de Paladine presented themselves the Guard refused to deliver the cannon to the teams.

Thiers, urged on by his own heroic boastings at Versailles, determined to take the cannon by force of arms. Counting upon the National Guard of the bourgeois quarters, together with some 20,000 troops, he decided, on the 17 of March, to seize the artillery. Whether he actually meant to take the cannon at the time, or if he meant his actions to be a gesture to complete the exasperation of the Parisians cannot be known. A conservative writer, the Count d'Herrison, declares:

"When we study the affair of the 18 of March, one almost comes to ask himself if M. Thiers really wanted to seize the cannon of Montmartre, and if his aim was not above all to obtain a popular movement that would permit him to evacuate Paris for the moment in order to retake it afterwards in a blood bath."

Be that as it may, on the morning of the 18 of March, at 3 o'clock the plan of Thiers was put into execution. Simultaneously, a proclamation of Thiers was being posted thruout the city which directed an attack against the members of the Central Committee who "under pretence of resisting the Prussians, who are no longer within our walls, have constituted themselves masters of a part of the city, raised entrenchments there and mounted guard," forcing others to do likewise "by order of a secret committee which pretends to be the sole commander (and) wishes to form a government in opposition to the legal government instituted by universal suffrage. . . . The cannon belonging to the State will be replaced in the arsenals" and for this "urgent act of justice and of reason" the government called upon the aid of all Parisians.

Vinoy, in charge of the expedition, was to occupy the western half of Paris, and General Lecomte was

given the 88th Regiment of the Line and some supplementary troops for the purpose of occupying the heights of Montmartre and seizing the cannon. At six o'clock, after a painful climb of the heights, the sentinel was surprised, the guard imprisoned, and the cannon captured. There had been practically no resistance, and with the exception of a wounded Guardsman, no casualties. The problem of moving the cannon arose: and the teams had failed to appear. At seven o'clock only a score of pieces had been carried to the foot of the heights, after considerable difficulty, and there was still a great number to be removed; the task seemed interminable.

In the meantime a crowd of all ages began to gather, composed mostly of women who began to speak to the troops: "This is shameful; what are you doing there?" While Clemenceau was congratulating Lecomte, a couple of guardsmen who had escaped from the heights had found somewhere a drum and were beating the rappel, and then the charge.

The streets were soon filled with the pealing of church bells; the tocsin was sounded; bugles were blown, and the National Guard came hurrying to the scene from all directions. Between them and the troops of Lecomte were the women and children, whom the general continued to threaten with dispersal. A post of the regiment of the 88th had joined the hurrying National Guards, and the men of the 88th in Lecomte's troops seemed ready to defend their comrades and go over to the Parisians. Lecomte attempted to arrest some of his own men without any success. Then, three times he gave the command to fire into the crowd. In vain. The men on both sides surged forward, the soldiers throwing their rifles into the air. The men of the Line had completely fraternized with the National Guard.

At nine o'clock the heights were retaken, the cannon replaced, the surprised guard released from their

cells, and the news of the victory announced to all Paris by the firing of three blank shots.

The crowd, ready to fall upon the arrested Lecomte and tear him to tatters, incited by the soldiers whom he had imprisoned in the Tower of Solferino, was held back by the National Guard which took Lecomte to the Chateau-Rouge, where the staff of the batallion was seated. There he immediately signed an order for the evacuation of the Buttes.

In the Chaussee des Martyrs, the general Clement-Thomas was recognized by the crowd and arrested. The insulter of the revolutionary batallions, the man who had drowned the revolution of '48 in blood, was seized by the mob, and together with Lecomte forced to the wall in the garden. Both of them crumbled under the scores of bullets and fell dead. Lecomte, who that morning had ordered his troops three times to shoot into the crowd of women, children and Guardsmen, wept, begged for pity, and spoke of his family!

The death of the two generals no longer left the question of the government's attempt in doubt. With the exception of the Place Pigalle, there had been no armed encounters between the people and the troops. The operations at Belleville and at the Buttes-Chaumont were editions of Montmartre. At eleven o'clock all the cannon, with the exception of ten pieces, were again in the hands of the Guard. Vinoy had fled thru the gates of the South with his troops, baggage, and artillery, following Thiers and the rest of the government to Versailles.

The Central Committee of the Federals (as the National Guardsmen were called) was master of Paris. On the day of the spontaneous uprising of the Federals against the attempt of Thiers, they gathered at the Hotel de Ville. A number of the members of the Central Committee were hesitant: they had been elected to defend the interests of the National Guard and of the Republic; they had no mandate of government. But

the old insurrectionary cry "Vive la Commune!" filled the hall and the timorous ones were finally convinced by the assurances that the Central Committee would remain in the Hotel de Ville but a few days, only so long as it would be necessary to prepare for the elections to the Commune.

These men, masters of Paris, with the enthusiastic support of almost the entire population, with a signal victory to their credit, did not realize that they were the only expression that the revolutionary proletariat of Paris possessed. With an unhappy carelessness born of indecision, unclarity and lack of direction, they permitted their incompetent commander in chief, Lullier, to take charge of the occupation of the abandoned forts. While they themselves demolished their barricades, Lullier took two days to occupy the forts of Ivry, Bicetre, Montrouge, Vanves and Issy. The strategic and impregnable fortress of Mont Valerien, the key to Paris and to Versailles was left unoccupied to the last day. Twenty muskets defended it, and the few chasseurs who had been imprisoned there burst open the locks and returned to Paris.

Vinoy, who had received news of the evacuation of the fort, finally prevailed upon Thiers to give an order for its seizure, and on the morning of the 20, it was taken by Versaillese troops. When the Parisians presented themselves at eight, that night, they were dispersed. And Lullier was at the same moment making his report to the Central Committee and even naming the batallion in possession of the fort Mont Valerien which was already in the hands of the Versaillese!

The conciliateurs, the mayors of the boroughs who feared a civil war, already betrayed by Thiers and Jules Favre, duped with empty promises, were nevertheless undiscouraged. They still sought to bring about a state of harmony between Versailles with four proposals: the nomination of Colonel Langlois to the command of the National Guard, the nomination of the

republican Dorian as mayor of Paris, immediate municipal elections, and assurances that the National Guard would not be disarmed. Favre, the minister for foreign affairs, draped in all the dignity of a gnome, exclaimed: "Well, Messieurs, what do you come to do here? You bring some propositions? One does not discuss, one does not speak with assassins!" A new insult, a final provocation had been added.

Langlois, nevertheless, took his nomination for granted. An old internationalist, the executor of the will of Proudhon, colonel of the National Guard and rather popular in Paris, he presented himself to the Central Committee to inform them of his nomination. "Who has named you?" "The National Assembly!" "Do you recognize the Central Committee " "I have been named by the government, I do not recognize you!" And Langlois, "who expressed with fury the most moderate of ideas and preached pacification as one proclaims a revolt" proceeded to show the Committee that unless they recognized the government of the Assembly they were working towards civil war and "you cannot have this pretension or you are madmen!"

It was explained to him that the National Guard intended to name its own chieftain, carry on the municipal election and get guarantees against the royalists of the Assembly. He was even offered the appointment under conditions. But the old fellow left with a tirade and in anger, and broke the last thread that still held Paris to Versailles.

Still the Committee did not take any decisive steps. The proposals of Eudes and Duval for an immediate march upon Versailles which would have forced Thiers to capitulate or to fly precipitately were not accepted, and the first sorties against the Versaillese were undertaken only when Thiers, in the breathing space gained by the indecision and indulgence of the Central Committee, had gathered together his motley but numerous army.

The same Committee, despite its anxious self-denial of the right of legislative functions, was acting like a provisional government. It took possession and strengthened the forts around Paris. It build up a form of ministerial cabinets by assigning Assi to the government of the Hotel de Ville; Greiler, assisted by Vaillant, to the post of the department of the interior; Varlin and Jourdes to finances; Combatz to the postal service; Edouard Moreau to the supervision of the Officiel, the organ of the revolutionaries, and the charge of printing; Duval and Raoul Rigault to the prefectory of Police; Eudes to the department of war; and even in this field the driving force was the fact that the flight of Thiers and his supporters had stripped Paris completely of any sort of administrative apparatus.

They dared not even open the coffers of the ministry of finance, but went begging to Rothschild, who gave them 500,000 francs and congratulated himself upon having been let off so easily. The governor of the Bank of France, an institution which their unreasonable legalistic superstitions prevented them from seizing, gave the Central Committee two million francs, the second only upon the appearance of two batallions of Federals who were ready to enforce the demands of the delegates.

Assi, a member of the International, one day after the uprising, already proposed the lifting of the state of siege and his words were unanimously approved. The Committee was so lenient and careless that it tolerated the threats of Lullier, their commander in chief who refused to march upon the bourgeois quarters where a counterrevolution was being hatched, and practically permitted this most abominable incompetent to escape from arrest so that he could henceforth carry on conspiracies against the Commune. In Lullier's place was put a military triumvirate of Brunel, Duval and Eudes, who, while declaring themselves

ready for action were already being occupied with the preparations of the reactionaries for a counterrevolutionary coup.

The intrigues of the conciliating mayors, especially in the first and second arrondissements which were beginning to look like armed forts, led to the demonstration of the reactionaries on March 21 and 22, an attempt to test the strength of the Central Committee. At the Place Vendome, on the first day, Bergeret, who was in charge of the headquarters of the National Guard was able to disperse the mob of royalists, students, Bonapartists and bullies by peaceful means. On the next day they returned, after having disarmed and beaten several isolated groups of Federals on their march, and began to shout "Down with the Central Committee! Down with the assassins!" Under the guise of an unarmed demonstration, they planned to capture the headquarters of the Federals. Bergeret had the riot act read and when they failed to disperse, a single volley sent them flying in helter-skelter fashion, leaving a street strewn with their knives, revolvers, sword canes and hats, with one Guardsmen killed and seven wounded; among the "peaceful" demonstrators, the most part of the casualties consisted of known Bonapartists.

The affair of the 22 not only convinced Thiers of the fact that the armed proletariat of Paris was in power, but it settled the question of an immediate municipal election. But for the apparently interminable negotiations with the mayors, thru which the Committee hoped to gain a semblance of legality for their elections, negotiations which once went so far that the Central Committee was forced by an aroused rank and file to disavow its emissaries for having compromised the people's interests, the elections would have taken place in a day. Humiliated by twice having to put off the date of the elections, the Committee finally set the day for the 26, after having first occu-

pied all the arrondissements which offered more or less resistance, and forced the signatures of the mayors and the deputies to the agreement.

All Paris was soon covered with election posters and announcements. The losses of war, the flight of the reactionaries and the bourgeoisie, the departure of hundreds during the days of the siege, had diminished the vote from the 485,569 electors announced in March, 1870, to 229,167, leaving an almost exclusively proletarian Paris. The bourgeois quarters elected their representatives to the amount of fifteen who never took their seats or resigned them. Of the other three or four score members elected, the overwhelming majority were revolutionaries, representing the working class of Paris. On Sunday, the 27, the results of the elections were already known and Paris took on a holiday appearance. The entire population turned out, happy, joyous, dancing with glee, with the old revolutionaries of '48 weeping out of joy.

The next day, the Parisian masses marched to the Hotel de Ville to the number of two hundred thousand. The cannon belched forth their salutes. Drums were beaten, bugles blown, hats thrown into the air, and the red flag, which decorated the facade of the building, flung to the air. The members of the Central Committee of the Guard which had been so fearfully anxious to give up its power, and the members of the newly-elected Commune, decorated with red scarves over their shoulders, appeared on the balcony. In an interval between the singing of the **Marseillaise** and the **Chant du Depart**, and the noise of the drums and cannon, Ranvier stepped forward and shouted above the din:

"In the name of the People the Commune is proclaimed!"

From the throats of the assembled thousands came an echo: **"Vive la Commune!"**

All Paris was in a delirium of happiness.

Seventy Days of Working Class Power

"The German philistine has lately been thrown once again into wholesome paroxysms by the expression, 'diotatorship of the proletariat.' Well, gentle sires, would you like to know how this dictatoship looks? Then look at the Paris Commune. That was the dictatorship of the proletariat." Frederick Engels on the 20th anniversary of the Commune of 1871.

It is well known that Marx, following the affairs of France very closely from his home in London, did not favor the overthrow of the government of the national defense and the setting up of the Commune at that time. On September 6, 1870, he wrote to Engels concerning a trip to Paris which was being made by Serailler for the purpose of arranging things between the Federal Council of Paris and the International,

". . . the French section of the International has travelled from London to Paris in order to do foolish things in the name of the International. They want to overthrow the Provisional Government and establish a Commune de Paris."*

And tho he recognized the "circumstances of extreme difficulty" under which the French workers were moving he declared:

"Any attempt at upsetting the new government in the present crisis, when the enemy is almost knocking at the doors of Paris, would be a desperate folly. The French workmen. . . must not allow themselves to be swayed by the national souvenirs of 1792. . . they have not to recapitulate the past, but to build up the future. Let them calmly and resolutely improve the

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* Briefwechsel zwischen Marx und Engels, Vol. IV., p. 330.

opportunities of Republican liberty for the work of their own class organization. It will gift them with fresh Herculean powers for the regeneration of France, and our common task—the emancipation of labor.'"*

But no sooner had the uprising of March 18 taken place than Marx placed himself in accord with it. With all the energy he possessed he defended the Communards with ardor, and pilloried its defamers with his merciless pen. In a letter of reply to Frankel and Varlin, members of the Commune who asked him for advice and aid, he wrote on May 13, 1871:

". . . For your cause I have written some hundreds of letters to all the corners and ends of the world, wherever we have connections. The working class however has been for the Commune from the very beginning. . . . The Commune wastes, it seems to me, too much time with petty things and personal squabbles. Evidently other influences than that of the workers are still active. All this will not matter, however, if you will still be able to make up for lost time."

Indeed, it was largely thru the influence of the International that the sympathies of the workers of Europe and America were aroused. In Berlin, Hamburg, Hanover, Dresden, Leipzig and other German centers, the workers held huge mass meetings in which they expressed their solidarity with the Commune. In England, its only supporters were the workers, and the small group of the Positivists, grouped around Professor Beesly, Frederick Harrison and a few others who wrote favorable articles in their organ, "The Fortnightly Review"; Fox Bourne, the editor of "The Examiner" also supported the revolution, news and information on which he received from Marx by frequent calls at the latter's home in Maitland Park. In the Reichstag, Bebel defiantly declared:

* Manifesto of the International Workingmen's Association, September 9, 1870.

". . . Be assured that the entire European proletariat, and all that have a feeling for freedom and independence in their heart, have their eyes fixed on Paris. And if Paris is for the present crushed, I remind you that the struggle in Paris is only a small affair of outposts, that the main conflict in Europe is still before us, and that ere many decades pass away the battlecry of the Parisian proletariat, war to the palace, peace to the cottage, death to want and idleness, will be the battlecry of the entire European proletariat." *

Just as true as the first declaration of Marx was his second. The Commune wasted too much time in the discussion of petty things, it was cursed from the beginning with unconscionably long-winded talkers and demagogues, it was weighed down by sentimental adherence to the traditions of 1793; it was characterized by the indecision and unsureness of lack of leadership and clarity of purpose, program and aim; it did not have a conscious and revolutionary working class party which would have enriched it with the sure, dominating organization of action; the Commune was palsied by a respect for that very legality which it was vaunting; it tolerated the mouthers of phrases, the incompetence of its generals and anarchy of its organization; it suffered from a multitude of witless opinions and neglected to build a powerful army out of the forces at its comand in order to take the offensive. It did not even organize its defense.

Yet, the very impetus of its own revolutionary existence was tremendous. The Commune took hold of the old bureaucratic and militarist apparatus, the bourgeois state, and crushed it in its hands, and on its broken fragments it placed the dictatorship of the proletariat, the workingmen of Paris organized as the ruling class of France. With a single stroke it abolished the standing army of the Second Empire and the Third

* Quoted by Kirkup from Mehring's History of the German Social Democracy.

Republic and replaced it with the people's militia, a force, directly responsible to the Commune, of all the men capable of bearing arms. It took the first steps towards the suppression of the enemy of the proletariat—weak and lacking in determination as these steps were—by the suppression of a number of anti-Communard journals, the arrest of the conspiring Versaillese within the walls of Paris, the virtual declaration of war against Thiers by the taking of hostages, the sorties against the Versailles forces and the appeals to the province for support.

The ruling body was based upon a real proletarian democracy, providing for the recall of unsatisfactory representatives, abolishing special allowances, paying all state officials the wages of workers, and realizing that "ideal of all bourgeois revolutions cheap government by eliminating the two largest items of expenditure—the army and the bureaucracy." The parliamentarism of the bourgeois society was smashed and the Commune transformed itself into a 'working corporation legislative and executive at one and the same time," and held itself up to the provinces of France as the mirror of their own future. Church and State were separated, ecclesiastical property was confiscated and all education secularized.

The pawned property and furniture of the workers were returned, the workers were relieved of the payment of the overdue rents, it abolished the sickening piety of charity and "relief," and resumed the pay of the National Guard. Thru Frankel, the Internationalist delegate of labor, it took its first steps, however few and unclear, to destroy the system of capitalist production and socialize it by turning it over to the trade unions; to ameliorate the conditions of the workers; to enforce a "fair wage" proviso in Commune contracts and abolish the abominable system of fines and garnisheeing of wages by employers; it planned the institution of the eight-hour day. Its internationalist

character was testified to by the Hungarian, Frankel's presence as delegate of labor, Dombrowski and Wroblewski, the Poles, in the defense.

Its heroic and noble spirit of sacrifice has been left as a revolutionary legacy to the new generations of the avenging proletariat. The Commune was a dim glass in which was reflected the rise of that greater and more powerful dictatorship of the proletariat, the successful proletarian revolution in Russia.

* * *

The composition of the Paris Commune was a most confusing one. There were the adherents to the French section of the International Workingmen's Association, of which there were in Paris alone more than four score branches, many of which, especially the trade unions which had been wiped out during the war and the siege, had disappeared. Their delegation in the Commune, numbering 17 members, was more attached to the doctrines of Proudhon than to those of Marx. To that extent, tho they comprised, according to Lissagary, with some exceptions, the most intelligent and most clear in the Commune, they were handicapped and transferred this handicap into the work of the Commune. Their obstinate attachment to the idea of autonomy for other Communes, their refusal to excercise any pressure on the provinces, but rather to permit them to decide of their own accord, their vain hope that natural spontaneous sympathy and a vague contact would rally the rest of France to their support, served as much as any other factor to isolate the Commune from the rest of the country.

Even on the night of March 18, the general opinion among the Internationalists was that Paris had merely gained its municipal franchise and that a period of calm was certain to ensue. The idea that a social revolution was taking place beneath their very eyes was very far from their minds. Varlin, one of their best, wrote to the Swiss anarchists, grouped around Bakunin and Guil-

laume concerning the events in Paris. He attempted to disabuse them of their notion that March 18 was the signal for the approaching universal social revolution by saying that it was only the right to municipal franchise that they had aimed for and won:

". . . the elections are fixed for the coming 26 and the moment the municipal council is elected, the Central Committee will resign its powers and all will be finished."

The fact that the mechanic Assi, a member of the International, headed the list of names signed to the proclamation of the Central Committee of the National Guard caused ignorant friends and foes to attribute the revolution to the International; and alphabetical coincidence was for them a conclusive proof. The attitude of Marx and the French internationalists themselves is sufficient evidence to disprove such a contention. True it was, however, that while there was no official participation at the beginning, if the organization was inert and did not react to the events of the 18, its ideas had penetrated into the minds of the masses of Paris who looked to the Commune for a change in their social and political lives.

The Blanquist party, which dominated the Commune, had been deprived of its leader on the day before the overthrow of the National Assembly. On the 17 of March he was seized in bed because of the death sentence which had been passed upon him by court martial for his participation in the uprising of October 31, 1870. So well did Thiers know the value of Blanqui to the Commune that he stubbornly refused to exchange him for the whole lot of hostages which were held by the Commune, including the Archbishop of Paris, the inspirer of Napoleon's illfated expedition in Mexico, Jecker, and numerous others.

The Blanquists, whose program and organization were directly descended from Babeuf and Hebert, the conspirators of '92, had but little thought for the mor-

row of the revolution. Their single steadfast aim was the overthrow of the bourgeoisie, the arming of the proletariat, the iron-gloved suppression of the counter-revolution, and the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat. Toward this end they built a conspirative, highly centralized, disciplined organization, excluding all who were not absolutely trustworthy and tried and fanatically attached, and chosen because of their personal courage, fidelity and self-sacrifice. With such a band of men, ready at any moment, Blanqui constantly planned for an armed uprising of a militant and determined minority for the rule of the revolutionary proletariat. For him, the revolutionary dictatorship was the dictatorship of working class Paris over the rest of France, since with the exception of a few of the larger towns, Paris was the real and only home of the revolutionary worker:

". . . One year of Parisian dictatorship in '48," wrote Blanqui, "would have spared France and history the quarter of a century now ending. If ten years are need this time, there must be no hesitation." *

This commendable singlemindedness, however, left the Blanquists without a single thought for the future. With eyes centered upon revolutionary action, they maintained that

". . . a social order, resulting from the social revolution will never have for its rational bases aught but the Family and the Commune, subject to the sole utilitarian moral of the common interest."

Without Blanqui, and with their small organization of a couple of thousand, they were left with a number of energetic men who could more easily ride a revolutionary wave than build a new society. The Blanquists —the affiliated, and the Blanquists at heart—had a practical majority in the Commune, but without their leader their revolutionary gestures, their slavish imita-

* Quoted by Postgate, Out of the Past, p. 66.

tion of the uprisings of '92 and '93, their disorder and inability to organize even the department of war brings one almost to agreement with the words of one of the leading Blanquists, Raoul Rigault: 'Without Blanqui, there is nothing doing, with Blanqui, everything."

Whether with or without Blanqui, his followers regularly opposed to the Internationalists' Proudhonian autonomous Commune, the dictatorial, centralized Commune which was to spread, thruout the length and breadth of France—and never did.

Besides these two groups, there were the unaffiliated members of the old Central Committee of the Guard and the Jacobins who lived in a mental revel of souvenirs of the revolutions of 1830 and '48. Their outstanding figure, Charles Delescluze, was an enemy of Blanqui but a Blanquist at heart. His personality dominated the Commune to a large extent. Bakunin, who had no use for the centralism of Delescluze declared that there were two kinds of Jacobins, "the Jacobin lawyers and doctrinaries like M. Gambetta . . . and the frankly revolutionary Jacobins, the heroes, the last sincere representatives of the democratic faith of 1793 . . . the magnificent Jacobins, at the head of whom is naturally placed Delescluze, a great soul and a great character."

But there were others among the Jacobins, Felix Pyat, for example. A coward, blageur, phrasemonger, he had once been labelled by a friend of Blanqui either a monomaniac or a police agent. Of less dangerous importance, but equally romantic were those who grouped themselves around him. And this diversified assemblage gave rise to the pettiest bickerings in which Pyat detested Vermorel, Vermorel had little use for Delescluze, Delescluze for Blanqui, and a dozen other similar personal discords which often threw the Commune into a frenzy.

Cursed with interminable talkers, the assembly of the Commune could sit and spend four hours in the

discussion of the most trifling subject while the manifesto of the Commune was approved almost without debate. Long drawn out discussions took place on the demolition of the Vendome column, which was finally ordered destroyed "as a momument of savagery, a symbol of brute force and false glory, an affirmation of militarism . . . a perpetual attack upon one of the three great principles of the French republic—fraternity." A lively discussion on the question of the theatres went on while the Versaillese were approaching the walls of the city on the 19 of May. And one of the most important discussions on the role of the Committee of Public Safety was interrupted by the endless feud between Pyat and Vermorel.

The Commune would organize one means of medical service and its general, Cluseret, another. On one day it would vote for a permanent chairman and the next week it would decide to elect one at every session. Nine days after a decision not to print the proceeding of the sessions in the **Officiel** it is voted that they shall be published there. The assembly sessions were a huge open forum with almost complete disorder, tolerant of nuisances, confused and contradictory.

As tho the ordinary difficulties were not sufficient, new ones were daily placed in the road of the Commune. The old Central Committee, which had been so anxious to unload its powers and responsibilities on to the shoulders of the newly-elected Commune, developed a tendency towards a dual power. Its delegation of greetings to the Commune, behind their "Vive la Republique! Vive la Commune!" announced that it would leave the power of government to the Commune and that the Central Committee would limit (!) itself to the reorganization of the National Guard. The military power of the Commune was to be under the control of the old Central Committee! On the 31 of March it announced to the Commune that it "had delegated the general Cluseret to the department of war where he would re-

organize the National Guard under the direction of the Committee." The Commune, fearing an open struggle and frightened by the failure of the sortie of April 3, finally conceded the point. Until the last day of the Commune ,the Central Committee practically defied its authority. While it would not permit the department of war of the Commune to do anything, it merely followed suit by doing nothing itself. Not all the blame may be placed upon the Commune for not building an army, for not utilizing the forces at the command of Paris, and for not fortifying Paris even to the moment when the enemy were already inside her walls.

The attempts made in the beginning to organize the work of the Commune were promising but ended almost without exception in failure. Commissions were created for war, general security, justice, finances, subsistance, labor-industry and -exchange, public service, foreign relations. An executive committee of seven was elected, charged with carrying out the decisions and laws of the Commune. But these commissions were autonomous units, never attempting the coordination of their work and finally degenerating into a single delegate who was more often than not totally unfit for his work.

The provisioning of Paris was carried on in a better manner than most of the other departments, the Commune opening a number of municipal markets and shops where food was sold at a lower price than ordinarily. The commisison of public service, which had been set, among other things, the modest task of studying "the means of putting the railways into the hands of the Commune of France without hurting the interests of the companies," managed to put into functioning condition the municipal service—and whether in doing that it hurt the interests of the companies is not known.

The work of the commission of postal service and telegraphs was an extremely difficult one. The flight of Thiers and Co. had left the Post Office in a terrible

condition: the stamps were gone and with them the engravings; nine-tenths of the employees had fled; the telegraphic wires to the provinces had been cut by Thiers. Theisz, a silver worker, managed to bring some order into the department. He created a functioning postal service in Paris, and thru a system of secret agents who posted letters in other towns, a service thruout the country. He reduced the staff of the post office and made plans for the creation of a sort of civil service examination for new employees.

Camelinat, a bronze worker in charge of the Mint, was one of the most successful. He prepared new stamps and new imprints for the coins and brought about such improvements that the Versaillese provided him with a safe conduct after the fall of the Commune for the purpose of instructing their own head of the Mint in the improvements Camelinat had perfected.

The attempts of the department of education were only a part of the progress made by the Commune. Valliant, the delegate, created a commission for the organization of primary and higher education which announced the opening of a school on the sixth of May. Attempts were made to reorganize the National Library and to reopen the museums. Education was secularized, and there the work stopped short.

Luckily for the Commune, the incompetence of the commission for general security—the police forces—was even less than that of the groups or traitorous conspirators who were in Paris. The spy Veysett, who attempted to bribe Dombrowski with 20,000 francs, was apprehended. From the records of the old prefecture of police a number of other spies were discovered in the ranks of the Commune and immediately seized. The threat of the Commune to shoot three hostages to every one killed by the Versaillese was never carried out until the last day of its existence, altho Thiers kept right on with his horrifying murders of all Parisians that were captured.

The commission of labor, industry and exchange, headed by the Hungarian Internationalist, Leo Frankel, and composed exclusively of socialist revolutionaries,* accomplished some of the most important and in a sense the greatest tasks of the Commune. It had set before it the task, according to the official decree, of being **"charged with the propagation of socialist doctrines.** It (the commission) must seek the means of equalizing labor and wages. It must also occupy itself with favoring national and Parisian industries." Even the Blanquists had agreed to the need of spreading the ideas of socialism among the masses, as one of the means of saving the revolution; and they turned this work over to the Internationalists ungrudgingly. For the Blanquists, however, that was the sum total of the work of the commission, and beyond a propaganda body they could see no further. With such an initial handicap it is astonishing that such a relatively great amount of progress was recorded.

Frankel, realizing the difficulties, and adapting himself to the position of the Commune, proceeded with his work in a very careful and steady manner. Rents overdue since October, 1870, were remitted. The pawning of objects was prohibited and a delay of three years was given to debtors. Night work for bakers was abolished together with the retention of fines and part of the wages by employers. A first small attempt was made to regulate employment by the registration of the supply and demand of workers and the establishment of offices to carry on the beginnings of what is now known as the employment exchange.

Unlike the revolution of 1789, which hurt the worker almost as often as it did the monarchy, the abandoned factories and shops were confiscated by workers' asso-

* Theisz, Avrial, Malon, Frankel and Eugene Gerardin of the International; Dupont of the Central Committee; Puget of the red republican club; Loiseau Pincon of the bourgeoisie.

ciations and a jury of arbitration fixed the indemnities due to the employer, a compromise which did not change the proletarian character of the action. The trade unions, almost wiped out during the war and the siege, were energetically rebuilt by the commission so that at the time of the fall of the Commune there were 34 district trade union councils, 43 productive societies and 11 other working class societies.

By a decree of the Commune all contracts were by preference to be given to workers' societies and towards the end all the needs of the National Guard were supplied in this way. An enlarged commission was organized by Frankel out of the representatives of all the trade union councils, for the purpose of considering the taking over of all abandoned and closed factories. The commission met once or twice and little was accomplished. Even this Proudhonist method of socialising industry was prematurelly killed by the death of the Commune. The difficulties of correspondence alone prevented Marx from having a greater influence upon this phase of the Commune's work.

Faced with disorder and weakness in all of the departments, the majority of the Commune again sought their inspiration from the days of '93. With a romantic gesture it constituted the first Committee of Public Safety on May 1, with Felix Pyat as its most prominent member, and armed it with dictatorial powers. Against the revival of this ancient corpse the members of the International, joined by a few others, protested vigorously, and denounced it as a step towards the creation of a dictator. From then on a bitter quarrel arose between the Commune majority and the minority.

The first Committee of Public Safety was a miserable failure. When the Versaillese had surprised a redoubt and the Committee was blamed for this defeat because it sent Wroblewski and Dombrowski to the fort of Issy, Pyat replied majestically: "Neither the Committee of Public Safety nor myself have signed any order com-

manding citizen Wroblewski to go to the fort of Issy." But when he was confronted the next day with the written order and was compelled to recognize his own signature, he airily begged the assembly to pardon his error.

Such vain incompetence aroused the old Jacobin Delescluze. In a fiery speech before the Assembly on the 9 of May, after the fall of Issy into the hands of the Versailese, he denounced the Committee: "One can do very great things by using simple words; I am no partisan of Committees of Public Safety; they are nothing but words." Therefore the Commune deliberated for a short time—and decided to create another Committee of Public Safety with different individuals. The minority which demanded representation in the committee was excluded, Vermorel was forced to quit the department of general security and Longuet the **Officiel**. Exasperated, the minority quit the Assembly and announced its return to the arrondissements. In their declaration of May 15, they say:

"By a special and express vote the Commune of Paris has abdicated its power into the hands of a dictator, to whom it has given the name of the Committee of Public Safety.

By its own vote the majority of the Commune has denied its responsibility and left all responsibility for our situation in the hands of this Committee.

The minority to which we belong affirms on the other hand the idea that it is the duty of the Commune to the political and social revolutionary movement to accept all responsibility and decline none, however worthy the hands to which it desires to entrust them. . . . (In our own arrondissements we can) usefully serve our principles and avoid creating in the Commune dissensions which we should all regret. For we are convinced that majority or minority, in spite of political differences, we all pursue the same end.

Political liberty. Emancipation of the worker.

Vive la Republique Sociale! Vive la Commune! *

The joy created by this split in the camp of the Versaillese and the anger of the workers they represented brought the most of them back on the 17, but the prestige of the assembly was considerably weakened thenceforward.

The second Committee of Public Safety was not any more effective than the first; and the declaration of the minority in the Assembly did not increase its prestige among the people to any degree. And the next step was the hunt for a dictator, a memory of '93 and Marat the friend of the people. Garibaldi had written to the Central Committee, refusing the post of commander of the National Guard: "Remember well that a single honest man must be charged with the supreme post with full powers." For Blanquists, who had followed Blanqui unswervingly for years, it was not unnatural to accept the idea of a dictatorship of a powerful individual. And while they hopefully awaited the return of Blanqui so that he could fill the throne of the dictator, Rossel, the delegate of war, prepared for a coup which would give to him the supreme power. His attempt failed and he fled the city.

In the meantime the preparations for a struggle against the Versaillese had been either completely neglected or most stupidly or incompetently conducted. The departments of foreign relations and of war, where the Commune should have been strongest, were its weakest points.

In the first place, the department of external affairs was in the hands of a Paschal Grousset, whose neglect of work was astounding in view of the tremendous vistas that lay before him. No efforts were made to gain

* Signed by Varlin, Theisz, Avrial, Clement, Frankel, Beslay, Pindy, Clemence, Eugene Gerardin, Lefrancais, Andrieux, Serailler, Longuet of the International; Jourde of the old Central Committee; Tridon the Blanquist, Arnould Valles and Vermorel of the Revolutionary press and party; Ostyn of the red republican clubs; Arnold, and Gustave Courbet the painter.

contacts with the hundreds of thousands of European workers who looked to Paris with anxious eyes and whose hearts beat in unison with that of the Commune. No efforts were made to utilize the important documents of the Napoleonic regime which lay in the old diplomatic files, documents which would have brought multiplied support to the Commune. Two sentimental and meaningless manifestoes were addressed to the provinces and hardly distributed.

The provinces might easily have been aroused if any efforts had been made to maintain connections between them and revolutionary Paris. The Commune had already seen its day in Lyons and Marseilles. The Commune existed at Toulouse up to the 27 of March; in Narbonne to the 31; at Marseilles to the 4 of April. In Limoges the Commune lasted a day. The Parisians might have reawakened these movements and thrown all of France into the throes of revolt. There were plenty of capable and trustworthy agitators, but they were not used. There was money enough to subsidize hundreds of journals and pay for thousands of men. But it was in the Bank of France and the Commune quaked at the idea of so violently trespassing the rights of property, and the old Proudhonian, Beslay, had sufficient influence to prevent the seizure of the money, which amounted to almost three billion francs—a most tremendous sum of money in 1871. All that the Commune got was the nine and a half million francs owing to Paris by the Bank of France, and an additional 7,290,-000 francs was secured after much difficulty.

Nevertheless, the provinces had a repugnance for civil war, and the bourgeois republicans began an agitation for the cessation of the attempts to attack Paris and for the recognition of the Republic, after the failure of the Parisian sortie against the Versaillese on April 3. The municipal elections, held on the 30 of April gave the republicans a majority. Simultaneously, two congresses of municipal delegates were held, one at Bor-

deaux and the other at Lyons to organize common action. Thiers gave the order to arrest the delegates and the two congresses were broken up.

The majority of the country, their delegates notwithstanding, was, however, quite passive concerning the events in Paris. The peasantry had been poisoned by the lies of Thiers and the country squires. They knew that the war between Bonaparte and Prussia had killed 30,000 Frenchmen, most of them peasants' sons; thousands were still in the hospitals; the German prisons held a quarter of a million men. The peasants were tiring of war and the slaughter of their offspring.

Yet they might have supported a revolutionary Paris, a government which demanded a more energetic war against the Prussian, "guerre a l'outrance," war to the bitter end, if such a revolt had succeeded on October 31 or on January 22. But March 18 was already after the beginnings of the peace negotiations, and the peasants saw in the Commune only a hindrance to the accomplishment of a peace that would allow their sons to return to the plow. And the small towns of France which always enjoyed their municipal franchise looked with only passing interest upon the struggle of Paris for the same rights.

The bourgeois republicans, with their boundless faith in the "protector of the Republic" Thiers, looked with a jaundiced eye upon the disreputable Jacobinism of revolutionary Paris. Their shuddering fear of socialism, overweighing even their dislike of the monarchy, limited their defense of Paris to a genial demand for no reprisals and the achieving of some sort of acceptable agreement.

The weakening defenders of Paris also had to counteract the most malicious lies and calumniations which Thiers spread regularly thruout the country and the continent. The Parisians are pillaging the treasury; the people await with impatience the moment of their delivery from this horror; a dictatorship usurped by

foreigners who inaugurated their reign by assasination; and scores of similarly unscrupulous slanders worthy of the shameless flaunters of their own tawdriness at Versailles. And France believed these frightful canards, after an incessant stream of them had flowed thru the land like bile.

The attempts of numerous conciliators to effect a rapprochement between the Versaillese and the Parisians were invariably met with the refusal of Thiers. In the national assembly, the reading by Brunet of his proposals for conciliation were met by wild interruptions: "We do not treat with brigands," cried the marquis de Dampierre. Delegations of all kinds were met with the same reply: Let Paris lay down its arms and the military movement will cease. Let the assassins be given up and there will be no reprisals against the people.

It was only, therefore, by a strong military force that the Commune could hope to establish itself, to hold its own against the bloodthirsty Rurals and the cunning Thiers who were planning the massacre of Paris. Many days had already been lost, decisive days. Thiers, without an army, had declared: "Come what may, I will not send an army to Paris." Before the municipal elections, the results of which gave the lie to the Assembly's boast of representativeness, Thiers again spoke: "There exists no cónsipracy against the Republic but that of Paris, which compels us to shed French blood. . . . Let those impious arms fall from the hands which hold them, and chastisement will be arrested at once by an act of peace excluding only the small number of criminals."

Bismarck, in the meantime, became impatient. On the 10 of May the treaty of peace was signed by Thiers and Jules Favre. It provided for the continued occupation of Parisian forts until "order" had been established. And so that this "order" might be swiftly consummated, the Prussian agreed to release the tens of thousands of

captives for Thiers to use in the suppression of Paris, and even offered the use of his own troops. The payment of the first installment of the indemnity was made dependent upon the victory of Thiers over Paris. The Assembly ratified the treaty of peace on the 18, and on the same day Thiers was still able to say to a group of delegates who sought conciliation: "Whenever the insurgents will make up their minds for capitulation, the gates of Paris shall be flung wide open during a week for all except the murderers of Generals Clement Thomas and Lecomte."

It was only on the day when victory was assured that this repelling scoundrel shouted triumphantly to the Assembly that he would enter Paris, with the laws in his hands, and demand a full expiation of the wretches who had sacrificed the lives of soldiers and destroyed public monuments. "I shall be pitiless," the wretch announced. With the aid of Bismarck he had rebuilt his army, fed and clothed it well, prevented it from coming into contact with the people and skilfully incited it with his fabrications against the revolutionary Commune. The troops that invaded Paris after the Commune were not the troops who fraternized with the National Guard! And it was the naive idea of the Parisians that any conflict with the Versaillese troops would be a repetition of March 18 that accounts for a considerable part of their optimistic feelings.

While Thiers prepared his forces, nurtured them and trained them, the Commune ran headlessly from one remedy to another. Eudes, the delegate of war, Duval, in charge of the police, and Bergeret of the National Guard were the military power at the outset. Only on the 2 of April did any serious military encounter take place. The Versaillese troops attacked a detachment led by Bergeret, chased them to the bridge of Neuilly, murdered the prisoners they took, and departed in good order.

Paris immediately took up the cry: To Versailles!

March on the Versaillese! Troops assembled spontaneously, filled with enthusiasm and at three in the morning of April 3rd, the march began. Bergeret and Flourens, with 15,000 men were to attack Versailles from the north; Eudes, with 10,000 men was to advance by Chaville and Viroflay and Duval, with 3,000 men, by Chatillon and Villacoublay. The troops of Bergeret and Flourens were obliged to pass beneath the cannon of Mont Valerien, the fort which Lullier's drunken incompentence had failed to take. The Communards did not believe that they would be fired upon: they thought that these were men of March 18.

But the thunder of the firing from the parapets of the fort awakened them in horror and surprise. The remains of the Federals managed to reach Rueil, where the enemy had massed itself, and in a short combat the Communards fled to Paris. Eudes was forced to beat a retreat from the woods of Clamart. Duval, after a spirited defense of the plateau of Chatillon for a whole day, was surrounded and taken prisoner. Paris was stunned. The failure of April 3 changed the entire military basis of Paris from the offensive, which they no longer dared risk, to the defensive.

For four weeks after the fiasco of the 3, Cluseret was given the command of the Parisian forces. With a mysterious reputation behind him—with Garibaldi in Italy, a general during the American Civil War, a Fenian conspirator in Ireland—he began to destroy the remaining strength of the Commune. The organization of the army, its division, and provisionment were completely neglected. Confusion was made worse confounded when the Central Committee began to interfere in the conduct of the military operations.

On the sixth of April, the Communards lost Courbevoise and then the bridge of Neuvilly. On the ninth, Dombrowski repaired the defeat by taking Asnieres and the Chateau de Becon, and then, deprived of reinforcements both of them were evacuated. On the 30

of the month, the fort of Issy, which had been strenuously defended, was evacuated by the greater part of its garrison—and Issy was a strategic point in the defense of Paris.

The Parisians were in a turmoil and demanded severe action. On his return from the fort, Cluseret, the eternal adventurer, the American-taught fraud, was arrested and placed in the prison of Mazas. Not only had he lost for the Commune the defensive points on the outside of the city, but the internal defense had been completely neglected. A young officer, colonel Rossel, was given the delegateship of war and he proceeded immediately to organize the remnants of the defense.

In the place of the incompetent Cluseret was now placed this young officer. Unfortunately for the Commune he was not a revolutionary. He had placed his services at its command because of the refusal of revolutionary Paris to hand itself over to shameful defeat by the Prussian armies. On the 20 of March, Rossel, who had revolted against Bazaine for his surrender at Metz, wrote to the minister of war that he placed himself without hesitation upon the side of the party "which has not signed the peace and which does not count in its ranks generals guilty of capitulation."

Rossel, with the aim of establishing himself as the savior and natural dictator of Paris, immediately turned to the disciplining and organization of the forces. Quite energetically he divided the Communard army into precise and mobile sections, organized the munitions and provisionment. In a short time he assumed the pose of a "friend of the people" so that instead of a vain Cluseret the Commune was cursed with a sly and ambitious Rossel, a warrior who sought the toga of the politician.

The carrying out of his plans for the construction of a second fortification within Paris, with three citadels—Montmartre, the Trocadero and the Pantheon—

he entrusted to Gaillard, a well known orator, with the hope of ingratiating himself with the revolutionaries. The result of his plan was the construction of a scenic barricade at the entrance to the **rue de Rivoli**, quite a formidable one it is true, but one which was never used except in the street fighting during the last days of the Commune.

But the cannon of the Versaillese continued to roar at the gates of Paris, despite the energetic Rossel. On the 3 and 4 of May, the Federals suffered severe losses on the redoubt of Moulin-Saquet. Against the fort of Issy the Versaillese suddenly uncovered 70 pieces of artillery, which battered it down so sucessfully that on the 9 it was captured.

The ten day regime of Rossel came to an end. In a desperate attempt to lead a **coup d'Etat** against the Commune by taking advantage of the military defeats, he completed his own ruin and marked another unfortunate page in the too tolerant history of the revolution. He asked for a cell in Mazas—a last moment gesture—and then fled with the aid of the member of the Commune who had been charged with guarding him, Gerardin.

The committee of public safety which followed soon earned its recall. The defense of the city was put into the hands of a civilian, Charles Delescluze. But where Cluseret and Rossel had not been obeyed, Delescluze's orders were as little heeded. Disorder still reigned in the ranks. Of the 1740 pieces of artillery that the Commune had at its disposal not more than 320 were ever used, and only the indubitable valor and bravery of the Communard soldiers made up in part for the constant shortage of cannon. The soldiers simply did not realize the essential necessity of discipline. Tales quotes an agent of the Commune who complained bitterly about the state of the army:

"It is to the bad state of discipline in our advance post that we must attribute all the unfortunate sur-

prises which we have suffered until now, and of which that of the Moulin-Saquet was the most grave and the most deathly."

To the aid of Delescluze in his difficult task came the Pole Dombrowski: an old officer of the Russian army, an insurgent in Poland, a revolutionary internationalist, calumniated by the Versaillese, a man whose military ability made him the object of an attempt at bribery by Thiers. But it was no longer a question of honest or capable generals. The army of the Commune had been so disorganized that it was now only a matter of a struggle for the preservation of life.

After Issy came the fall of Vanves, with displays of such desperate heroism that the Communards retook Vanves at the point of the bayonet on one day only to lose it forever on the 13 and 14 of May. On the next day the entire village of Issy fell to the Versaillese. Five days later, the troops of Thiers opened up fire with a powerful battery of 300 pieces and slowly the walls of the town began to crumble. Only ruins covered the southwest entrance to Paris. The enemy prepared for the decisive stroke.

On May 22 a spy named Ducatel, seeing the gate of Saint Cloud undefended, signalled to the Versaillese troops who watched from their trenches. Beginning with the afternoon the huge army of Versaillese filtered into Paris, the army which already outnumbered the forces of the Communards by ten to one.

On the evening of the 21, Billioray of the old Central Committee, rushed in to the sessions of the Commune and tremblingly read a paper announcing the entry of the Versaillese by the gates of the southwest. Tumultusly, the session was adjourned. It was the last session of the Assembly of the Paris Commune. Together with it fell the tragic second Committee of Public Safety.

Golgotha

"We are honest gentlemen; it is by ordinary laws that justice will be done. We will have recourse to nothing but the law." Thiers to the National Assembly, May 22, 1871.

With its last breath, facing extinction, the Communards fought like the most courageous of heroes. Delescluze, abdicating his authority as commander, called for revolutionary war by the people, war with naked arms, war on the barricades. There was no longer even a pretense at a strategic retreat, an organized defensive. It was every man for himself and only the natural tendencies of crowds united little groups of men to struggle in their various sections. Debouching everywhere the Versaillese gained ground, foot by foot, every hour. On the 22, La Muette was taken, then the Trocadero; a bloc of Federal artillery was taken in the capture of the Military School.

The Communards now made a desperate attempt to rally against the enemy. At the first sign of the end, the cowards, with Felix Pyat at their head, removed their red sashes and fled. Dombrowski, Delescluze, Varlin, Rigault, Ferre and a few others made an attempt to organize the defense but it was hopeless. For a few days the tigerish heroism of the defenders, outnumbered as they were, even checked the enemy. Scenes of unknown self-sacrifice and noble courage were hourly occurences. The Comunards died with the Marseillaise on their lips and the shout **"Pour la solidarite humaine!"** Dombrowski, realizing the end and saddened by the suspicions cast upon him, exposed himself to the fire of the enemy and was riddled by balls in the rue Myrrha.

One after another: Montmartre, the historic battleground of the revolution was taken by 30,000 men because the Commune had failed to send reinforcements

and munitions; the cemetery of Montparnasse was occupied and the Federals were being flanked on every side, driven to a corner. Raoul Rigault was found lifeless in a street. Ferre, the Blanquist chief of police, saw to the shooting of the spy Veysett, and gave the order for the killing of the hostages—after the Communards, maddened by the savage slaughters of Thiers, demanded reprisals.

Delescluze, who had been sent in an attempt to secure some sort of mediation between Paris and Versailles, thru the good offices of the secretary to the American ambassador, was prevented from leaving the city by the guard at the gate. The shame of being suspect was too much for him: "I do not want to live any more, all is ended for me," he repeated. He marched to the barricades of the Chateau-d'Eau and without looking back, faced the Versaillese with only a cane. The austere and noble old Jacobin fell dead with fratricidal bullets.

The Commune now suffered its death pangs. The leonine struggles on the barricades were of little avail. The Versaillese pressed forward. On Sunday, May 28, the last barricade was taken. At noon, the last cannon of the Communards was fired. The next day a small squadron seized the outlying fort of Vincennes, shot the Communard officers against the wall, pulled the red flag from the mast and ran up the tricolor of the republic of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity. . . .

But the monstrous scoundrel Thiers had not finished. It was necessary to thoroly purge Paris of subversive notions, to drown its revolutionary spirit in a bath of its own blood; a massacre was an essential prerequisite for the achievement of year-long tranquillity. So there followed the bloody week of May, the most frightful slaughter, the most cold-blooded murder of men since the days of the Byzantine Empire. To the scoundrelly patriots of Thiers' mold, the Communards were far

more detestable than the Prussians; indeed, it was only with the aid of the Prussians that they managed to conquer Paris. The party of "order" was in power.

"Pitiless murder!" With this order were the Communards exterminated. Those found with black marks on their fingers, indications of having used gun powder, or those who still wore a bit of National Guard uniform were shot in their tracks. Three hundred Federal refugees were shot in the Madeleine. At the square of the Pantheon hundreds of Federals were massacred. Huge heaps of corpses were piled against every wall in the city. The wounded and the medical corps equally were killed by the bloodthirsty troops, despite the concord of the International Convention at Geneva.

Members of the Commune were avidly hunted like dogs, and even Free Masons were murdered on sight. Varlin, one of the most capable figures in the Commune was cruelly assassinated. The Versailles press would announce the execution of Cluseret, Valles, Ferre, Lonquet, Gambon, Lefrancais: and all of them were living! Unfortunates, who could not prove their identity were killed in their places.

Moderates, republicans, men who had never participated in the Commune but whose staunch republican ideas made them suspect were done to death. Milliere, the deputy to the National Assembly, was forced to his knees in the Pantheon and shot; the doctor Tony Moilin suffered the same fate. The presence of foreigners in official posts in the Commune gave rise to a hunt against all strangers: Poles, Hungarians, Italians, Hollanders and Germans were shot almost on sight. Neither women nor children were spared: "They are probably Communards anyway."

Anonymous denunciations were sufficient in most cases for the seizure and death of a Parisian, and thousands died in this manner. The fable of the **petroleuses,** women oil thowers who were alleged to have set fire to buildings, brought about the death of

scores. Thousands were tried before drum-head court martials which devoted only a second to each individual. Those who were sent to Versailles for retrial had to pass thru a gate guarded by the Marquis de Gallifet. This horrible butcher stood there and selected haphazardly hundreds of men and women out of the purest whim, and murdered them against the wall.

"To find a parallel for the conduct of Thiers and his bloodhounds we must go back to the times of Sulla and the two triumvirates of Rome," wrote Marx. Where rifles failed to slaughter the hundreds of victims who were driven to death like droves of cattle, the miltarilleuses were substituted. Huge graves, yards wide and deep, were dug for the murdered Parisians and they were flung in like so much dirt. The hastiness with which they were buried brought horrible nightmares to those who passed by or lived near these mass graves. At night a still living arm would be thrust out of the ground, or a leg which still wore the uniform of the National Guard. In the butchery many of the wounded had been buried alive! Unearthly groans and heavings issuing from the ground, made Parisian life a ghastly nightmare. Bodies rotted in the bleak rooms of the proletariat, awaiting a hasty internment.

Every family in Paris gave at least one sacrifice to the cause of the Commune. The insatiable sadism of the bourgeois hyenas spattered every wall of Paris with the stain of noble proletarian blood. The rivers of Paris ran red with blood, a constant broad stream staining its course for days during the **Semaine Sanglant.** A new amusement afforded the degenerates of Paris: ..**La peche au federe,** which consisted in betting on the amount of Federals' corpses that would float under a bridge in a given time.

Gallifet, "the kept man of his wife, so notorious for her shameless exhibitions at the orgies of the Second Empire," was the most frightful monster of

them all. He would gather hundreds of suspects into a closely huddled mass and choose his victims; according to a report of a bourgeois contemporary journal.

". . . A mounted officer pointed out to General Gallifet a man and a woman for some particular offense. The woman, rushing out of the ranks threw herself on her knees, and with outstretched arms, protested her innocense in passionate terms. The General waited for a pause, and then with the most impassable face and unmoved demeanor said: 'Madame, I have visited every theatre in Paris, your acting will have no effect on me'. . . . It was not a good thing on that day to be noticeably taller, dirtier, cleaner, older, or uglier than one's neighbors. One individual in particular struck me as probably owing his speedy release from the ills of this world to his having a broken nose. . . . Over a hundred being thus chosen, a firing party told off, and the column resumed its march, leaving them behind. A few minutes afterwards a drooping fire in our rear commenced, and continued for over a quarter of an hour. It was the execution of these summarily-convicted wretches." *

Not all died the death of heroes. Some bought their worthless hides with their own shame. At the trials Urbain, who proposed the decree on hostages, grovelled before the court and denounced the "crimes of the Commune." Jourde, the delegate for Finances, servilely apologized for the relations of the Commune with the Bank of France. Rastoul announced that his protest against the Commune's murders and crimes exceeded that of the Versaillese. Courbet, the painter of delicate pastorals, declared that he had voted for the demolition of the Vendome column only on aesthetic grounds (!) and repudiated the work of the Commune. The shameless drunkard Lullier, the first Communard general, boasted that he was in the pay of Versailles.

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* Quoted by Lucien Sanial from the London Daily News of June 8, 1871.

But the best of the Communards, as tho with deliberate thrusts as these fawning cravens, shouted on the gallows: "Vive la Commune!"

Estimates vary as to the number that were murdered by the Versaillese after the fall of the Commune. Beyond a doubt, however, there were between twenty and thirty thousand slaughtered. Hundreds were exiled to bleak islands on the African coast. In all the Commune suffered at the hands of the reactionaries a loss of some 100,000 of the flower of the Parisian proletariat. The Commune paid with seas of blood for its historic and audacious attempt to establish the first revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat, to emancipate the slave from the yoke.

". . . We shall remember June and October, and we too shall cry: Vae Victis! The fruitless butcheries since the June and October days, the wearisome sacrificial feast since February and March, the cannibalism of the counterrevolution will in itself convince the peoples that there is only one means of shortening, simplifying and concentrating the torturing death agonies of the old society, the bloody birth pangs of the new society, only one means—revolutionary terrorism."*

Thus wrote Marx on the aftermath of the revolutionary uprisings of 1848. The historic Wall of the Federals, around which more than ten thousand Federals and Communards were slaughtered by the miltrailleuses of Thiers, bears mute testimony to the failure of the Commune to make full, iron use of the power which it had in its hands. It remained for the Bloody Week of the hideous Thiers to write the costly lesson large in letters of blood in the primers of the French working class and the workers of the world.

Aftermath: The Fall of the International

Marx, as has already been noted, had opposed the

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* Der Fall Wiens, von Karl Marx, Aus dem literarischen Nachlass, von Karl Marx und Friedrich Engels, vol. III, p. 199.

setting up of the Commune, believing rather that the workers should use the relative freedom which the Third Republic afforded them to build up a mighty organization which in time would be able successfully to develop a proletarian revolution and hold it against all enemies. But when the workers rose in their armed might and fought to seize power Marx did not, like a pedant would, aid the enemy by an aloof chastisement or deprecating references to the untimeliness or incorrectness of the uprising. On the contrary he summoned all the genius at his command to aid them and threw the weight of his virile pen and the forces of the First International into an enthusiastic defense of the Commune.

> ". . . What elasticity, what historical initiative, what capabilities of self-sacrifice there are in these Parisians!" he wrote to Kugelmann immediately after the uprising. "After six months of starvation and destruction by internal treason even more than by the external enemy, they rise, under Prussian bayonets as tho no war existed between France and Germany and the enemy did not stand before the doors of Paris! History has no similar example of such greatness! . . . The present uprising . . . is the most glorious deed of our Party since the June insurrection." *

The real extent of his influence on the life of the Commune is not fully known. It is known from a letter by Marx to Professor Beesly that he was in fairly regular communication with the Communards. On the day after the signing of the Bismarck-dictated peace treaty with Favre and Pouyer-Quertier, he already informed the Communards of the facts. Thru an old friend, one Sigismund Borkheim, a successful wine merchant whose business called him constantly for trips from London to Paris, he kept in touch with the revolutionaries, and received his information on the treaty thru the right hand man of Bismarck, Lothar

* Brief an Kugelmann, April 12, 1871, p. 86.

Bucher! Marx, who had a hold on Bucher because of the latter's former connection with the German revolutionaries, was able to inform the Communards of the agreement reached whereby the first installment of the war indemnity was to be paid to Bismarck only after the victory of Thiers over the Parisians.

And when the Commune fell, it was not only a blow to Marx but also a death-thrust to the International. Jules Favre, the minister for foreign affairs of the Versaillese, called upon all the governments of Europe to suppress the International. Later the Spanish foreign minister followed suit and also pleaded for the hounding to death of the First International. The International was pointed to by all as the "insidious and secret organization" which brought about the revolution.

> ". . . You know," wrote Marx to his friend Kugelman, "that during the whole period of the Parisian Revolution I was constantly denounced by the Versailles sheets . . . and par repercussion by the journals here as the 'grand chef de l'Internationale'. The address (on the Civil War in France) . . . made a stir like the devil and I have the honor at the moment to be the best calumniated and most menaced man of London. . . . The government sheet—the 'Observer'—threatens me with legal prosecution. Let them dare! I scoff at these canailles!" *

The knell of the International had sounded, however, and its demise was hastened by the bitter struggle that now developed with dagger-sharpness between the Marxists and the followers of the anarchist Bakunin. The German Eisenachers began to move away from the International and consider themselves as a party within the borders of the German empire. In France, Thiers and Jules Favre passed an exception law against the International, and the factional strife which developed in the ranks of the Communard emigres in

* Brief an Kugelmann, June 18, 1871, p. 88.

London, some of whom Marx drew into the General Council, did not considerably strengthen its influence. In Italy the strongest section of the International was suppressed and the movement fell under the influence of the Mazzinians. In Spain the Federal Council was forced to flee from persecution to Portugal.

In England, Odger and Lucraft, trade union leaders who had been with the International from its inception, used the publication of the Marxian address on the Paris Commune, as an excuse for withdrawal. They had made use of the International to insure their struggle for electoral rights and were now flirting with the Liberals. Marx had commented on these intrigues with the Liberals and bitterly denounced the departing Britishers as deserters who had sold themselves to the ministry for a mess of pottage in the form of a few laws that were passed which apparently gave greater liberties and rights to the unions only to ensure a deletion of any radical tendencies.

The London Conference of the International in 1871, from which a number of countries were absent, was dominated completely by the Marxists. But the Bakuninists were by no means crushed. They continued to build up their secret Alliance of the Socialist Democracy. Bakunin demanded that the International be a mirror of the future of the anarchist society by abolishing all centralization and authoritarianism. Marx correctly insisted upon a centralized revolutionary international. The two factions of the dying International began to work fevereshly for the capture of the coming Congress at the Hague, on September 2, 1872.

At the Hague the Marxists had a majority of the delegates. The Bakuninists—Bakunin was not present and Guillaume led the fight—accused Marx of having packed the Congress with falsely-credentialled delegates; and there is but little doubt that many of the delegates might under ordinary circumstances have had a more justified origin. A little more than a

month before the Congress Marx wrote to Kugelmann:

> "At the International Congress (Hague, opening September 2) it will be a question of life or death of the International, and before I step out, I want at least to secure it against the disintegrating elements. Germany must then have as many representatives as possible. If however, you will come, write to Hepner that I beg him to provide you with a credential as delegate.
>
> "Your, Karl Marx." *

A similar letter was written to Sorge in America. Marx came to the Congress with a credential from New York, and one each from Leipzig and Mainz; Engels received a credential from Breslau and New York. Hepner, of the Leipziger Volksstaat, was credentialled from New York; the Berliner, Friedlander, was a delegate from Zurich. For three days the Congress was taken up with the discussion of credentials and it was only on the fourth that they were able to get to their agenda.

The main aim of Marx was accomplished. The Bakuninist Alliance was roundly condemned and Bakunin himself, together with Guillaume and Schwitzguebel were forthwith expelled. The principle of political action was reaffirmed. The headquarters of the International were moved to New York.

In America a few more conferences were held before the International was officially declared dead; in Europe the anarchists followed suit and dwindled down to next to nothing. The fall of the Commune, the bitter internal struggles, the coming to a close of a revolutionary period in Europe and the entry of the labor movement into a "peaceful" stage of development, brought the great first International to an end.

The Heritage of the Commune

The Commune is written large in the history of the working class of the world. It was the first great

* Brief an Kugelmann, July 29, 1872, p. 91.

attempt of the proletariat of a nation to establish the rule of the working class thru the dictatorship of the proletariat, accompanied by weak, unclear efforts to adapt to this overthrow of bourgeois domination a new social order.

The weaknesses, shortcomings, hesitance, lack of clarity and insufficiencies of the Commune have been pointed out. The lessons to be learned from its experience must be studied by the struggling working class of the world.

The main source of the weakness of the Commune can be traced to the absence of a determined, conscious revolutionary party which would have given it direction, firmness and decision.

> "If in September, 1870, there had been found at the head of the proletariat of France the centralized party of revolutionary action," writes Trotsky, "the entire history of France and with it the entire history of Humanity would have taken another direction. If on the 18 of March power was found in the hands of the proletariat of Paris it was not because they had consciously seized it, but because their enemies had quit Paris."

Without a revolutionary proletarian party, without such an instrument the Paris Commune could not, despite the unparalleled heroism and the self-sacrifice of its noble defenders, maintain itself. With a ruling body in which almost every delegate represented a different viewpoint, in which there did not reign a dominating single clear idea, it was natural that the results would prove fatal to the uprising. Even the vague viewpoint which united its two leading groups was shattered by the concrete experiences which they underwent. The Proudhonians found their doctrinaire hatred for association of labor and industry confronted by their own decrees in the Commune which aimed at the organization of great industries and the federation of the workers in every factory into one great

association. The Blanquists, the doctrinaries of highly-pitched dictatorial centralism, failed to follow out even their own theories and neglected completely the centralization of the political and military apparatus, as well as the agitation in the provinces for the unity of revolutionary Communes thruout the land.

The Communards made the error of failing to use the power which had fallen into their hands to consolidate the rule of the working class and complete the ruin of the bourgeoisie. The failure to push the attack upon the Versaillese and spread the hegemony of the revolutionary proletariat thruout the country was a fatal blow to the uprising. Their refusal to push forward determinedly the work of expropriating the expropriators, taking over the economic life and substance of the city was another source of weakness.

The feebleness of their attempts to put hands on the Bank of France, which as Engels says was worth ten thousand hostages, was an indication of this grave fault. This point was only a sharp indication of the failure of the Communards to take even a thousandth part of the advantages of power to suppress with an iron hand the enemy, that the Versaillese took.

The history of Bloody Week is a bitter lesson learned by the proletariat, a lesson which means unrelenting struggle against an unscrupulous enemy, the utilization of all the instruments and means of proletarian power for the extermination of the brutal vampire of the ruling class.

The difficulty of an insufficiently developed working class, the lack of a political party of clear principles, tactics and experience, and the absence of highly developed industry, might have been overcome by the Commune had it not been forced to assume the defensive on the military field from the beginning. Its natural anxiety for defense from extermination by the Versaillese made it, to put it mildly, difficult to begin very much economic work. The steps it took despite

these difficulties already gave an indication as to the real socialist nature of its economic measures and quite safe predictions can be made as to the development towards a socialist economy that might have resulted thru the military victory of the Comunards over Thiers.

The Commune, slandered and calumniated by the bourgeoisie for decades, is the property of the revolutionary working class today, in the Communist movement where its spirit is embodied. The Commune lives in even more heroic form, in broader lines, with more power and greater clarity of purpose in the revolution of the Russian workers and peasants. The existence of the revolutionary movement of the working class today, honoring the great Paris Commune and carefully learning from its experience, the existence of the first working class republic in Russia is the vindication which history and the working class have rendered the heroic efforts of the Parisian working men.

The working class of Russia has long ago learned the lesson of the Paris Commune. Painstakingly they built up their iron regiments into a mighty Bolshevik party, armed with the sharp weapons of Marxism, and dominated by the irrestisible will to power which led the first successful proletarian revolution in the world. The revolutionaries of Russia knew that the chief source of success in the uprising for liberty was a conscious group, a party of the vanguard of the working class which would be able to give leadership and direction to the struggle, the lack of which was the evil genius of the Commune.

And the Communist movement of the world today, learning equally the lessons of the Commune and of the three revolutions in Russia; of the revolutions and uprisings in Germany, Hungary, Bulgaria, Italy and Finland, is preparing for the revolution by building up more strongly every day the fighting parties of Communism, steeled in every struggle.

"Workingmen's Paris," wrote Marx in his brilliant Civil War in France, "with its Commune, will be forever celebrated as the glorious harbinger of a new society. Its martyrs are enshrined in the great heart of the working class. Its exterminators history has already nailed to that eternal pillory from which all the prayers of their priests will not avail to redeem them."

It is the admirable and fitting eulogy to the immemorable action of the Paris workers. The celebration of the Commune is the celebration of the approaching victory of the most oppressed class in history. The lessons of the Commune are being slowly learned by the workers. In its lofty spirit of heroism the revolution of today finds new inspiration and courage and determination.

"The cause of the Commune is the cause of the social revolution," said the greatest Communard of all times, Lenin, "of the complete political and economic liberation of the working class, the cause of the proletariat of the entire world. And in this sense it is immortal."

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